

## THE ANDAMAN ISLANDERS

137 the Onges as hiding-places or temporary shelters. In these cavities,  
 [136] which remain full of water right through the dry season, flourish  
 a horde of amphibia, many hitherto unknown.

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 202 The great trees are sometimes so close together that it is literally  
 impossible to pass between them, yet it is rare to find two of the  
 same species next to each other, so great is the variety. Huge clumps  
 of ferns are everywhere, hiding the roots of dying trees, hundreds  
 of years old, and fallen trunks rotting on the ground. Some of the  
 thicker and taller trees protect themselves from the monsoon gales  
 by developing buttresses, usually four or six to a tree, which stand  
 out from the trunk like right-angled triangles, with the apex about  
 ten metres from the ground. If a blanket is stretched between the  
 sloping sides of two of the buttresses one can improvise a shelter  
 which is extremely comfortable by local standards, and both man  
 and animals take advantage of this natural cover; I myself took  
 shelter like this on many occasions. (They need to be treated with  
 caution, however, as the local snakes have a predilection for siestas  
 in the darkest corners.) If a hard piece of wood is struck against one  
 of the buttresses it echoes hollowly, and the Andamanese often  
 make use of them to transmit warning messages over considerable  
 distances, using a form of code. A few beats can make every inhabit-  
 ant within a wide radius vanish from sight, hastily making for the  
 nearest hiding-place. It is hopeless to try and ferret them out once  
 they have been warned, and there is always a risk of being killed by  
 one of their arrows in the process.

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 [522] Sometimes the Onges used to disappear suddenly for fun. The  
 blackness of their skin is a great help in this, since even on the  
 brightest afternoon it is intensified by the obscurity of the forest.  
 One has a disturbing sensation of being entirely alone, yet knowing  
 that dozens of pairs of eyes are watching as the Onges glide silently  
 from trunk to trunk between the buttresses.

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 [481] The whole island is a mass of knotted vegetation, and it is useless  
 to attempt to cut any form of lasting path, as the plants immediately  
 grow back. 'Walking' in the Andamans therefore means opening  
 up a way with a hatchet, unless one adopts the rapid but exhausting  
 Onge method of swinging over obstacles by the lianas. This is the  
 kingdom of the epiphytes. The lianas cover their hosts as if deter-  
 mined to hide them, and clumps of orchids hang from nearly every  
 trunk, although their flowers are unfortunately very small.